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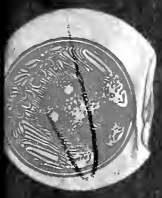
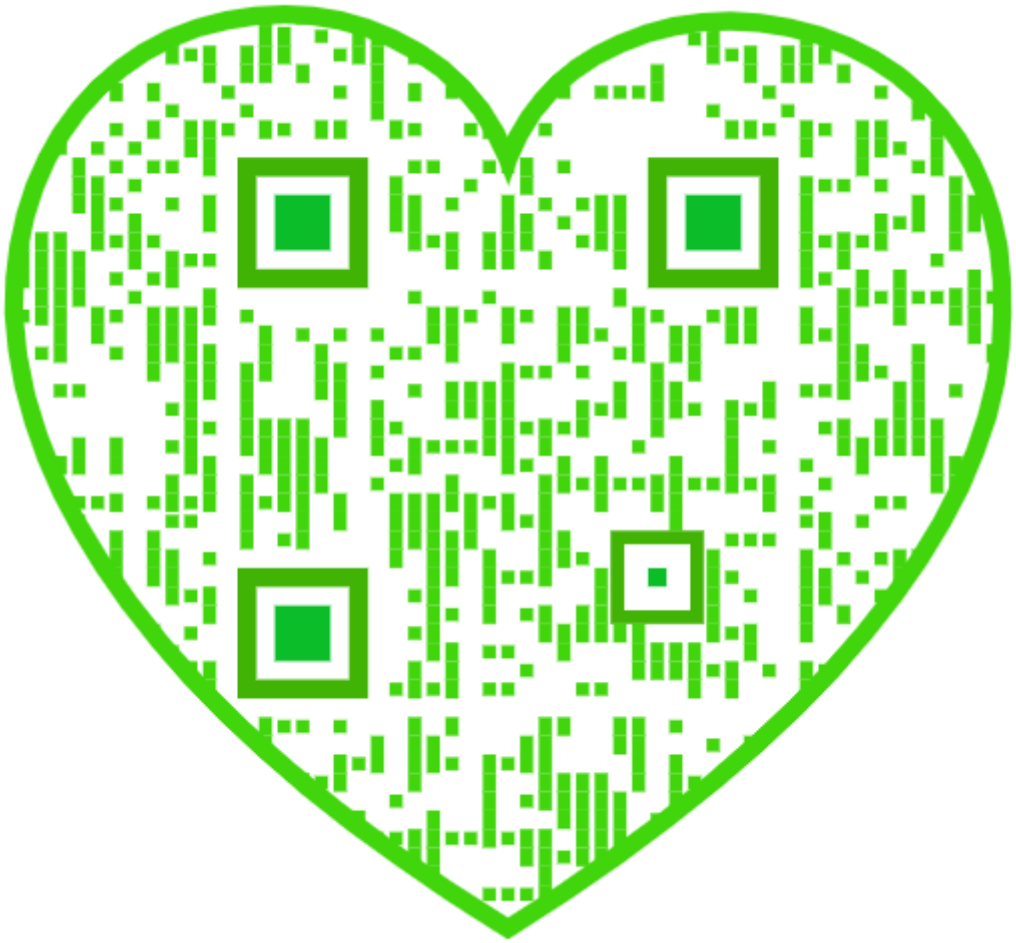


THE CHRISTMAS TRAIL AND OTHER POEMS

Shirley Harvey



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THE CHRISTMAS TRAIL AND OTHER POEMS

THE CHRISTMAS TRAIL AND OTHER POEMS

BY

SHIRLEY HARVEY

CONCORD
NEW HAMPSHIRE
1916

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To

EDWIN LESLIE MCFALLS

To *The Aegis* and *The Bema* the author is indebted for permission to reprint many of the poems appearing in this volume

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THE CHRISTMAS TRAIL

THE snows drift deep on the mountain's breast,
And the winds from the north are still,
There's a star in the east, and one in the west,
And the moonlight's on the hill.

'Tis vain you look for the campfire glow,
And hark for a friendly hail,
For every manjack's cut the snow
And packed on the Christmas Trail.

And what is the Christmas Trail, you say?
And where do its travelers roam?
Just chuck this thought in your kit to stay:
The Christmas Trail—leads home!

DREAM PATHS

A SILENT moment in the moonlit night,
A glimpse through leafy paths that wind along
Under the shadows pierced with trembling light,
And then,—quick laughter and a burst of song
Across the campus.

Wind-whispers in the trees, a distant star,
A sudden flood of restless, throbbing dreams,
A flash of seer-like vision,—and afar
The waver of a myriad twinkling gleams
From shaded windows.

THE CHAPEL BELLS

OUT o'er the snow-bound campus,
Breaking the frozen night,
Wrangling one with the other
In hurrying headlong flight,
The bells ring out through the twilight,
Chapel bells in the twilight—
Iron bells in the twilight,
That challenge the winter night.

Hurrying feet o'er the campus,
Crunching the brittle snow,
Shadows surging forward
And calling to and fro,
Answer the bells through the twilight,
Chapel bells in the twilight—
Iron bells in the twilight,
That challenge the winter snow.

THE CABIN

AN OPEN door at the end of the trail,
A bunk of boughs at the long day's end,
A shadowy form, a long clear hail,
And a grip, may be, from the hand of a friend.
Then we'll burn our bacon and spoil our dough,—
And send our cares where the dead men go.

An open door at the end of the trail,
And a leaping fire as the night draws in,
With a pipe to smoke as the hours fail,
A snatch of song, and a yarn to spin.
While the shadows shake on the rafters wide,
And the winds sweep free on the mountain's side.

DARTMOUTH TO HER SONS

YOU have breathed of the headless winds
That sweep from the silent north;
With blenchless eye you have faced the hills
And the storms that their wrath brings forth.

You have struggled as man to man,
Sought shelter side by side;
You have seen the way my spirit blazed
In the paths that the fearless ride.

I have taught you to break the shell,
To value the man—not birth;
The toil of the trail has stripped your soul
To know what that soul is worth.

I have wrought the north in your heart,
I have swept her wind in your face.
Go forth with hand and vision clean,
Go!—carve in the world *my* place.

THE TROPHY ROOM

ACHIEVEMENT'S calm broods o'er thy bannered wall,
Silence,—yet faint like thunder from the past,
A whisper on the crest of memory's blast
Seems still to haunt the shadows of thy hall.
Motionless, soulless trophies, yet ye call
A quickened pulse, a tightened hand; thou hast
The power to sweep us backward, hold us fast
While surge upon surge about us ever fall
The whirling phantoms of dead victories.
Rank upon rank, in crashing marches, tread
Those legions that have gone to chart the way.
Silence,—but like the beat of changeless seas,
We feel that unformed murmur from the dead,
Sounding the charge, like wind-wraith of the fray!

TO THE COLLEGE CHURCH

HOW shall we answer thee, Mother of Men,
If thou shouldst bid us halt our onward race,
And say, "Here in the quiet altar space
Of this my temple, knelt thy fathers, when
Walled in by silent hill and wooded fen
They dared to fear their God, yet dared to face
The wilderness, and carve therein a place;
And then in reverence thank their God again?"
Ah! must we answer thus, and say to thee,
"The fear of God no longer steels the heart."
Our vaunting knows no compass or regret;
No longer are we brave to bend the knee
Unless in mockery. Thou standst apart.
Oh, spirit of our fathers, we forget.

TO THE OLD BRIDGE

OFT have I glimpsed you from the river's turn
At sunset, when the glories of the sky
Warned me with blazing beacons to return,
And cease my ramble ere the night drew nigh.
Oft have I trod your dim and shadowed way,
Where gilded dust-motes tremble at the sun,
And vagrant river-breezes bid one stay
To dream a moment when the day is done.
And still, when other paths shall guide my feet,
And sterner tasks shall fret these hands of mine;
Amid the change and hurry of the street,
I'll dream again I glimpse you through the pine,
At evening, when the sunset's burning glow
Crimsons in turn the weaving stream below.

PATH O' DREAMS

COME dream with me along this golden strand;
Flee this dark, shadowed shore, and breast
the light,
Treading this path o' dreams to fairy-land,
Leaving the world behind to slumber in the night.

Come live with me along this golden strand,
And build our days out of its laughing light,
Nor fear to face the shadows of the land,
That guard the quiet of the slumbering night.

THE ELMS OF EASTON GREY

DIM are thy shadows, black thy naked limbs,
Castilian lace against a winter sky.
The memory of past ages ever dims
The present. Underneath thy branches lie
The molds of ancient shadows long since gone
To join the multitude of passing things
That phantom-like shine out, and then anon
Fade in oblivion. Well might kings
Envy the wisdom in thy silent calm.
Sublime ye watch the struggling life that rolls
And throbs around thee, soothing with the balm
Of thine eternal shade those stricken souls
Who creep to thee from failure's lash, to feel
Thy benediction through their beings steal.

THE BUTTERFLY

(From the French of Lamartine)

BORN with the spring, and dead with the rose,
Swinging with zephyrous wings to the sky,
Quivering, drunk with the perfume that flows
From the light, on the breast of the flowers you lie.
Shaking in youth the bright dust from your wing,
Like a breath to the uttermost heavens you swing.
Butterfly, thus is your destiny played,
Like desire which never a resting place knows,
Unattained, flitting lightly wherever it goes.
So seek the deep sky ere your pleasures shall fade.

A POOL IN THE WOODS

STILL mirror of wood mysteries, you lie
Silent and placid in the quiet glade
Where broods perpetual dusk. Are you afraid
To mirror aught but these dim forms? Dare try
No brighter fancies to embrace, to pry
No deeper into life than matching shade
With equal shade? Were you not made
To parody as well a sunset sky?
Close sheltered in the calm of your retreat,
The blackest tempest of the lightning flare
Scarce touch your surface, for you stand apart.
Oh, might some venturing sunbeam swiftly beat
Down through the canopy of trees and dare
To light the very depths of your still heart!

THE SONG OF ST. MARTIN'S BRIDGE

CASTILIAN skies flash blue above,
Sing! Toledan maids.
Castilian hearts are made for love,
Leap! Toledan blades.
At sunset-tide I'll wait you where
St. Martin's bridge is mirrored fair,
All rose-red in the crimson flare;
With sword or song I'll meet you there.
Leap! Toledan blades.

Castilian skies flash blue above,
Sing! Toledan maids.
Castilian hearts are made for love,
Leap! Toledan blades.
For rose-lipped, dancing gypsy-maid,
Beneath St. Martin's balustrade,
I'll sing of love or draw the blade,
Till passion's youth shall wane and fade,
Leap! Toledan blades.

CHRISTMAS EVE

A BLAZING log-fire and a happy thought,
A touch of wind about the gables' ends,
A dance of dreams and visions fancy wrought,
The play of children, and the laugh of friends.

FAILURE

I STOOD upon the gray November shore,
And watched the steel tide ebb complainingly,
And wondered vaguely could it flow again.
Its helpless, slow retreat half matched the pain
That chilled my heart. For like the pounding sea,
I, too, knock ever at a fast closed door.

THE TOY-SHOP

LIFE is such a little thing,
What's the use of worrying!
Like a child upon the stair,
Standing in the sunlight there,
Crying for a broken toy
Or frightened at a puppy's joy!

We've the universe to trace,
Earth is such a tiny place!
Like a silent toy-shop, say,
Lots of toys but none to play,
Just the owners walking slow,
And figuring profits as they go.

Here's a man who cannot sleep
Because the shadows round him creep;
Another, trembling at a noise,
Fears a robber steals his toys.
Frightened still, as children are
Wandering lost in Life's Bazar.

Oh, why can't we laugh and sing,
Life is such a little thing!

THE SONG OF THE RIDERS

OUT, out on the road and away,
With the dawn burning red on the brow of the hill,
And an answering fire in the pond and the rill,
With the shoe striking sparks on the flint of the ledge,
And the slash of the green when it's flanks to the hedge,
Out, out horsemen, out and away!

Chorus:

Out, out on the road and away—
And away,
Out, out horsemen, out and away!

Up, up o'er the hills and away,
With the noon burning down on the red cottage roof,
And the dust smoking back from beneath the swift hoof,
With the creak o' the leather and smell o' the land,
And the foam from the snaffle thrown back on your hand,
Up, up through the heat, and away!

Chorus:

Up, up o'er the hills, and away—
And away,
Up, up through the heat, and away!

On, on through the dusk, and away,
With the chill of the night wind caressing your cheek,
The whippoorwill's cry from the reeds at the creek,
The gall o' the saddle, the tug at the rein,
The ring on the highway, the thud on the lane,
On, on, spur on, and away!

Chorus:

On, on through the dusk, and away—
And away,
On, on, spur on, and away!

YOUTH CALLS

COME tramp away the dawn with me,
Hip, knee, and arm joints swinging free;
No dainty, mincing promenade
Where city pavements jar your heel,
But country paths where you may feel
The springy earth that God has made!

Come tramp the Greater Road with me;
And take the paths where we can see
The foot-prints of the pioneer;
No beaten trails where herds have gone,
But just a dim path leading on,
Blazed by some unknown seer.

EVENING

A FAR, dim stretch of gray road winding free,
A timid bird-note in the evening calm,
The shadowy pine trees murmuring their psalm,
A still light burning in the dusk for me.

AN EASTERN PARABLE

I CAUGHT the flickering of jade,
The flash of silver and of pearl,
And underneath, as if afraid,
The brilliant eye-gems of a girl—

That mocked and laughed and fled away.
No longer flickered pearl or jade,
Dead jewels without light or ray,
The hollow shell of life betrayed!

A CHALLENGE

THERE'S a wind running wild on the mountain;
Who'll tame it with me?
Who'll breast the cold rush of the fountain
Whose torrents surge free?

Who'll dare the storm and the thunder,
The dark and the pain,
Dim groping in paths where hands blunder,
Lose grip, and regrip in vain?

Who'll face the wild laughter and mocking
Of Nature's harsh bourn?
Who'll battle on pathways the earthquake is rocking
In anger and scorn?

Battle the winds that storm, leaping
Round mountain and cloud,
While smug in the valley are sleeping
The dull-hearted crowd!

VOX TEMPESTATIS

I WATCHED the night come down apace;
I heard the barren trees
Mutter their scandal each to each;
I heard the hard surf on the beach
Mocking the chilly breeze.
I watched the cold moon's brilliant face
Dim 'neath the gathered clouds;
I caught the first rush of the gale,
I heard the snarling breakers hail
The reefs in their foam-spun shrouds.

And then above the tempest's blast,
Out of the wind that hurried past,
I heard the cry of souls aghast
At the hungry rolling sea,
Chant loud and wild, like souls forlorn,
A dirge of death, on the breezes borne,
The wail of men when the heart is torn:
Miserere Domine!

I heard the whine of the coming sleet,
The hiss of the rain-scourged sea;
Only a moment the moon shone out,
Through tattered clouds gold edged about,
But the waves showed clear to me,
Blank and clear where the surges beat,
Then the moon was veiled again.
The storm broke with a sullen roar,
The lightning bridged from shore to shore,
And the sea was dark with rain.

Was it the souls of the ocean's dead,
Torn by the gale from their weedy bed,
Who chanted low in accents dread
That hollow chant to me?
Bewailing with their hopeless groan
That surged above the ocean's moan
A sinless sin they cannot atone?
Miserere Domine!

THE SEARCH OF SPRING

WHEN the Spring is on the hill,
Laughing in each brook and rill,
Peering slyly down the vale,
Peeking into every dale,
What is it he seeks to find?
Something Winter left behind?
Does he seek a place to hide
When the Autumn's winds shall chide,
Urging him to flee again
From the Winter's sleet and rain?
Or, perhaps, he hopes to see
Fairies dancing fancy-free,
Criss and cross on dainty toe
Weaving charms no one can know!
South Wind, tell me from your lore
What the Spring is looking for!

GALATEA

CAN you not feel me with your chisel point?
Does it not tremble, sense the sacred thrill
Of the warm marble that is o'er my breast?
No, you are like the others; so I still am blind.
Your chisel gropes like theirs, your hand is weak;
And I who sheltered here, as I have often crept
Into rough marble that the sculptor waits,
Must flee again, and leave the marble cold.
And you shall carve as you have done before,
As others have, and men shall mock or praise,
While I, still blind, must hurry on again.
And yet I thought,—when I had fled and left
That painter with his lifted brush in air
Whose master hand I hoped might find me sight,
When I left him, to blindness and half truths,
And came to you, and crept in the chill stone;
How cold,—your chisel groping at my heart!
I felt the tremor of your guiding hand,
I thought, Ah, here at last is one whose soul
Shall catch the flutter of my heart, and steal
The darkness from my eyes, and set me free:
The perfect beauty of a Perfect Art!
But no, your chisel erred—I felt the point.
Your soul, too little to conceive my shape,
Must guide the chisel in its little way;
And I, with wounded heart, must flee again.
Oh, could I only see, to watch you work
Your blundering will upon the shapeless stone
That once I thought to warm with my own life!

Out of whose radiant virgin purity
I was to step beneath your god-like hand!
No, I must hurry on to some brave soul,
Make heart and marble one, or lurk unseen
Behind the blankness of some painter's frame;
Or creep within some poet's drying line,
Perchance to find some wild musician's strain
That, issuing from the organ, shall lay bare
My soul, and give my eyes their starry sight!
So I have dreamed before, and yet in vain.
Blind! blind till some seer-like soul, with mind
Immortal to the petty thoughts of earth,
Shall find me hiding in his shapeless clay
And set me free, perfect in form and line!
Why do I tarry? Already I can hear
A youth who calls to me with joyous heart,
With soul that throbs with dreams of wondrous things.
Into his canvas will I cramp my limbs;
And warm his blending colors while I feel
His hot breath laboring through parted teeth,
Feel his brush tremble at his passion's touch;
And his clear eyes, beaming like stars, unseen
But even in my darkness felt, shall watch
With awe, while slowly 'neath his quivering hand
In perfect purity my soul shall leap
Into clear being; and his earthly paint,
Warm on my bosom, laughing in my eyes,
Lustrous in shadows where my tresses fall,
Shall mock the very earth from whence they sprang!

TO A GIRL WHO "COULDN'T ENDURE TOBACCO"

I'M NOT surprised you couldn't stand my pipe;
That's woman's way.
You've not the knack of seeing half the worth
In good P. A.

The poetry of the curling smoke is
Lost on you.
You "can't endure it!" No, of course you can't,—
You're not expected to.

It takes a mind, and not complexion,
To understand
The peace and fellowship encircled
By a cigar band.

TO A PLAGIARIST

YOU have given us dross from the many,
And gold from the few;
You have given us much that was ancient,
A little that's new.

You have played the thief with the dead,—
That's shameful I know;
And yet you have picked with discretion
The men you would owe.

Your sin of a truth is unholy,
And yet I condone;
Far better to give us the worst of another
Than the best of your own.

HERE'S TO —

THE little poets of little thought and song,
Who sing so carelessly,—and jog along;
Who without thought of critic, or of gain,
Go spattering lyrics like an April rain!

AUGUST 1914

A MILLION war-swept people raise
  Their stricken hands in air;
The women voice a nation's woe
  Too great for them to bear;
And babes stretch out a tiny palm—
  And find no mother there;
    For kings into each other's hands
    Have thrust the sword of war.

The humming mills no longer pour
  Their smoke across the sky;
Where once the harvest fields stretched fair
  The grinding armies lie;
And women learn with blenchless face
  To watch their husbands die;
    For kings into each other's hands
    Have thrust the sword of war.

How long, how long, oh, Silent Christ,
  Must we, thy children, hear
The iron words of mimic gods
  Call out their war-like gear;
How long must we thus blindly die
  Beasts brutalized by fear,
    When kings into each other's hands
    Shall thrust the sword of war?

THE SHADOW

A LONG, low, level stretch of plain,
Rich with a harvest that never will be
Garnered, except by wheeling crows that scream
About marauding hares and nibbling mice:
The only gleaners left to claim a share.
Sunlight, and warm winds that stir the grain,
The silence of a summer afternoon,
Perpetual Sabbath kept in No Man's Land.
Out of the south, drifting on the tide
Of peaceful winds, a sweeping veil of smoke,
A thin, dun cloud that ever surges on,
Waxing in blackness, billowing fold on fold,
Until The Shadow darkens all the plain,
Turning the yellow wheat to dusky bronze
That glints the blood-red sunlight struggling through
The tumult of the skies.

TO ONE WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF THE RED CROSS

R. N. H.

NOT for the petty broils or rage of kings,
Not for the lust of land or empired pride,
Have you made sacrifice! The hand that flings
The tri-color on your bier can never hide
With partisan flag the cause for which you fell!
"For France?" Nay, rather say Mankind; the path
That led your feet to death can truly tell
Of Calvary. Your mercy mocked the wrath
That surged insanely round you, as your hand
Toiled to undo the evil hate had wrought.
Greater because you served at no command
Except the call that spoke within; and nought
Can dim the laurel now, or stem the tear
That falls, a benediction, on your bier.

TRAMP STEAMERS AT DAWN

PHANTOM ships in the fog-gray dawn,
  Masters of wind and tide,
Leaving your land-locked anchorage,
  The wind-stripped seas your guide,
Beating out from the harbor's peace
  To the toil of a road untried,

What is the call that comes to you
  From out of the weaving mist?
What do you seek in the voiceless sea?
  What shadow keeps your tryst?
Some dingy quay in an island-port,
  Or a reef where the breakers twist?

A RAILROAD YARD AT NIGHT

HERE in the night,
Half mystic, half realistic in its lure,
Twinkling with weaving, streaming light,
Red and green spattered, here garish, here obscure,
With many-fingered beams criss-crossing
And retreating back again,
The Yard binds in a Gordian knot
These silver threads that, creeping from the night,
Are seized as by a genii's hand and wrought
Into this maze of shifting light,
A murmuring, threatening, human firmament
That mocks the heavens.

THE SONG OF THE CRICKETS

WHEN the birds of night are hovering, and day
is on the wane,
And the shadows stretch and cover all around,
You can hear the summer crickets, through the
medley of the sound,
Sawing out their quaint and shrill refrain.

As the mists are slowly gathering across the meadow
land,
A white haze out of nothing, where nothing was
before,
Then the fiddles of the crickets set to music all the
lore
That's been taught them by the flitting fairy band.

With a zing-ing-ing, and a trill at the close,
And a rasp where the rosin fails,
They fiddle the tune that the cricket knows,
When the saffron sunset pales,
With a trit, trit, trit, and a tee-ee-ee,
And a rasp where the rosin fails.

Now it swings in double volume; and then slowly dies
away,
As its beat and throb flows smoothly up the hill.
Now it rings a sharp falsetto, or bursts into a trill,
As the fiddles strike into another lay.

Then at last in slower cadence; and with muted fiddle
strings,
They sweep the meadow with their lullaby;
And the hillside sounds are silent as the last strains
slowly die,
And the cricket troupe aside its music flings.

With a zing-ing-ing, and a trill at the close,
And a rasp where the rosin fails,
They fiddle the tune that the cricket knows,
When the saffron sunset pales,
With a trit, trit, trit, and a tee-ee-ee,
And a rasp where the rosin fails.

THE OXEN

THEY were toiling on the hillside in the golden-yellow gloaming,
With the purple of the shadows lying thick along the wall.
Dumb, they walked along the furrow, and their sweaty flanks were foaming
As they bent their steaming shoulders to the labor of it all.

Dumb, they toiled along the furrow in the labor of it all.
And the brown dust warm and heavy hung in clouds about their shoulders,
And the yoke-pins shook and rattled with the plow-share's rise and fall.
Indistinct upon the hillside, there they loomed like living boulders.

Indistinct upon the hillside, black and gray like living
boulders,
Toiling grimly in the twilight, never knowing whence
they wrought,
Like a vague and quaint enchantment that in ancient
saga smoulders,
Toiled the oxen on the hillside in the dusk the
shadows brought.

Labored mutely, uncomplaining, in the dusk the
shadows brought,
Never asking, never knowing, blindly toiling 'neath
the goad,
Blindly bending in the twilight to the labor of their
lot,
By the gods foredoomed to struggle, living,—
dying, 'neath their load.

A COW-PATH

YOU wander like a vagrant child across the weed
grown pasture-side,
Lying among the hardhack bloom, half buried in
the golden-rod.
A ragged tramp of slender means, you prove indeed
a rambling guide
Who winds about nor ever leads to paths that other
men have trod.
You skirt the hill, and ford the brook, seeking the
coolness of the brush.
Care-free and blithe you wind about, a rattle-brain
without a thought
Or worry as to whence you come. At evening in the
twilight hush,
When faint and still the pasture lies, wrapped in
the gloom the dusk has brought,
Your way becomes a fairy path, rich with the fantasy
of dreams
That leads one into gypsy lands that reckon not the
rule of kings,
But, filled with hope and peace and love, the quiet
world about you seems
A land where wishes spring to life, a prodigal who
freely flings
His riches lavishly to all who seek him when the day
is done,
Crowning his gift-cup with the gold that scatters
from the setting sun.

THE SONG OF THE GROUND-HOG

BASKING on the stone-wall, sleepy in the sun,
Watching out for shepherd dogs, and farmer-boys with guns,
Rolling in the barley patch, nibbling at the peas,
Hiding where the alder shoots are whipping in the breeze;
For the warmer winds are blowing,
And the farmer's sowing rye,
The sunshine's in the clover field,
And Spring is marching by.

Lying underneath the bank, listening to the rain,
Whistling at the bay mare browsing in the lane,
Drowsing at the burrow's mouth, when the weather's fine,
Listening to the baby crows squabbling in the pine;
For the warmer winds are blowing,
And the farmer's sowing rye,
The sunshine's in the clover field,
And Spring is marching by.

THE SESTINA OF THE NEW ENGLANDER

AN HOUR to dream in, and an hour to sing,
An hour to think of friends who are not by;
Yes, that is all that I would ever ask
The day to grant me ere it fled away;
To watch the sunset kindle on the hill,
Knowing it burnt no evil that was mine.

To know that somewhere in this heart of mine,
There dwelt a thought that made another sing,
And, when the shadows stretched along the hill,
To feel no loss that day was hurrying by;
So could I watch the sunset die away,
And answer anything my soul could ask.

So will the labor that the world may ask,
The daily toil or sorrow that is mine,
Breed no remorse to steal my peace away,
And bid my heart to weep or falsely sing.
I'll find my sermons in the wood hard by,
And read my benedictions from the hill.

For as our life is like a rough-scarred hill,
So let us climb in wonder, never ask
To know the hidden dangers we've passed by.
I am content if these slow feet of mine
Take but a faltering step; my heart can sing
The longer if the end looms far away.

The log that burns the quiet night away,
The hollow bird-note from the darkened hill,—
These have so many songs I cannot sing,
My swelling heart can only fondly ask
That all these simple treasures that are mine
May fall to others, too, ere they pass by.

No, let the pomp and glitter pass me by,
And bear ambition's longings far away;
They leave no sorrow, for they are not mine,
They cannot scourge me faster up the hill.
The happy gift of plodding—that I ask;
I would not hurry so I may not sing.

Let life slip by, night gather on the hill,
And if from far away comes one to ask
The secret that is mine,—I bid him sing!

GOING DOWN THE HILL

NIGHT is on the high-road,
The tavern lights shine fair,
The lanterns of the farm hands
Are swinging here and there.

The primrose cups are open,
The golden-rod looks gray,
And the deep gloom of the apple tree
Is blotted 'cross the way.

The night is on the high-road,
The countryside is still,
And the home-light smiles a welcome
As I go down the hill.

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